

CITY OF AUBURN

EXAMINING BOARD OF PLUMBERS

TUESDAY, JANUARY 10, 2012

Members Present: Mr. Steve Bianco, Mr. Bill Orman , Mr. Carl Castiglione

Members Absent: Mr. Frank Siracusa and Mr. Greg Gallinger

Staff Present: Tom Gabak, Doug Selby, and Kim Bauso

Carl Castiglione, Plumbing Inspector called the meeting to order on Tuesday, January 10, 2012 at 5:00 p.m.

Approval of meeting minutes from December 13, 2012. All present Board members in favor of approval.

WATER LEAKS DISCUSSION:

- a. Steve Bianco and the Board wanted to know how the Water Department (represented by Tom Gabak) handles residential and commercial water leaks and the letters that go out to property owners. Tom Gabak starts by saying they found 54 leaks this year and stating that NYS Leak Detection listens at the hydrant for a leak. If they hear a leak, they actually go to the valve in the road before the leak to pinpoint it. Tom states that there was confusion with a notice going to 57 Wall St. regarding a leak but it was actually supposed to be 59 Wall St. By the Tom got involved he went to the property, checked the appropriate card and from the road to the curb stop they had copper, something was still leaking so they turned it off and the noise went away. Tom then stated he met with the homeowner and told them it was an inside leak from the curb box to the house and the City wasn't responsible for that. Tom further stated when they come across a leak, his department goes out and checks them to verify, a letter is generated by the Water Billing office that states "A leak has been found inside/a leak has been found outside.." whose responsibility is what etc. and a timeframe is given for it to be fixed. If the leak is on the outside from the main to the curb stop, the City does the work and the property owner is billed. If the leak is inside....Bill Orman then asked how it is determined where the leak is in the house and Tom replied that if they are listening on the shut off, it can be heard on the shut off with the copper phone, If it is turned off & the noise isn't heard anymore, that means it's from the curb box to the house, but if the noise is heard, that means it's from the curb box to the main. Steve Bianco asked when going the other direction, towards the house or towards the building, doesn't everything in the building have to be off to pick up the difference. According to Tom, the difference can be heard in the noise. A running toilet, a shower, that noise is called a hit and a leak is a hit, you can tell the difference. One guy Tom said has been doing it for 23 years, he knows, he's got it down to a science. Steve then asked if Tom was saying they didn't have to shut off inside, a shower running or toilet being flushed, that doesn't matter? Tom replied that's

why they do it at night and hope that no one is running the water. Tom further stated that it gets written down on a list and is always verified by his guys. Carl Castiglione then stated if he were to look for a leak, he would go in and shut off the inside valve. Tom replied to be 100% positive, you'd have to. However he stated that's not the City's responsibility because if he broke the shut off then people would be complaining. Steve then agrees with this but on the other hand if the Water Department is going to tell someone their water line is bad, shouldn't they be 100% positive before they send out the notice before making someone replace a line.

- b. Tom brought up the exception to the rule with another house, 71-73 Van Anden Street, Dave D'Alberto's house, the Water Department notified them of a leak there, he didn't know who went there. The owner got a notice, he did have an old galvanized line from the main to the shutoff and it had to be replaced. As per our Code if we come across a line that is not copper after 25 years of age it has to be replaced. So the City was going to replace it from the main to the curb stop. Then however the homeowner contacted Tom and said not to do that, he knew he had a problem in the house based on a \$3,000 water bill (\$3,700 per Steve Bianco) and he stated he would fix it. He called Tom back and said it was fixed; Tom went there the next day, listened and didn't hear the noise anymore. Steve then said that was his point, the homeowner had a running toilet on the 2nd floor but he got a letter from the City saying he had a leak in his water service. Although this one got cleared up without anyone having to replace anything, Steve pointed out that there have been other jobs they know of where the homeowner replaced the line without even checking it.
- c. 310 Clark Street, Tom asked. That was one said Steve. Tom said that was a leak. Steve said that's three so far that he knows about. Tom replied that was old galvanized line and it needed to go. Steve then stated the homeowner replaced it, at a cost of \$4,000 or so. Tom replied that that wasn't his problem, Phil Fletcher replaced it, it was old galvanized line and needed to go. Steve pointed out how costly this was and if there isn't 100% certainty that stuff is leaking...
- d. Another one that happened, said Tom, was 13 Wall Street, Mr. Kerstetter owns it, leak detection found a leak, we pulled the card, copper, shut the valve off, the leak stopped. Turned out the equipment is so sensitive and can usually pinpoint down to inches but this one was so close to the box. Another one that might be a simple mistake but it was a problem taken care of...(inaudible/cross talk) Steve asked about this being the initial letter the homeowner gets and Tom replied that 9 times out of 10, the homeowners call him. He'll go there and see if the meter is spinning around like crazy or give them a dye patch to see if their toilet is leaking, he works with them and gets the ball rolling. So when this company finds a leak, the homeowner is responsible for coming up with isolating the valve inside and making sure the line is in fact leaking so to speak. Tom reiterated that all they do is turn off at the curb stop, that's the City's responsibility. Tom said from the main to the middle of the curb stop, the homeowner owns the whole line; from the main to the curb, the City will do the work. Curb stop in the homeowner

has to hire a plumber. Furthermore, just because waters not flowing out of the ground doesn't mean there's not a leak. Tom mentioned a main break on Wilbur and Pulsifer, leak detection found it...it was going into the sewer right next to it. You're not always going to see it but you can hear it. Carl then said to Tom that the wording in the letter these homeowners get sounds almost threatening. Tom agreed that it does but that homeowners need to understand this is a serious problem. Bill Orman reads from a sample letter that states "There is a leak in the water line" and conceptually he sees a problem with that, again questioning Tom "Are you sure you guys *know* that?". Tom said "we can change anything you want" and asked if it would help if they changed the letter to say "you *may* have a leak..." or "a possible leak may have been detected at this address". Steve said it should say "possible leak in the house or into the house" and Tom said yes, they could change the letter to say that, to notify the homeowner that there is a potential problem. Steve began to speak again of the \$4,000 bill for 310 Clark St. and how the homeowner got the letter and was frightened by it and hired somebody to get it replaced, no questions asked. (*Inaudible*)

Tom spoke of one property on South St. that it had been 7 months since they'd gotten the letter and it still wasn't repaired and it had been forwarded to Mr. Rossi. Tom thought it was 3 months that they were given and after that the City can charge people, it's in our Code that they can be charged an unmetered fee because it's coming out of the meter but Tom says he doesn't do that. There was some discussion between Carl and Tom whether it should be 60 days or 3 months. Carl (looking at copy of letter 310 Clark St. received) said to Tom it states 60 days in the letter, fifth paragraph down near the bottom, 60 days to complete the work. There was then some discussion (*cross talk*) regarding the accuracy of the leak detection/ outside company.

- e. Steve explained that this all came up because he was getting phone calls, everybody was getting the same kind of letter and there was nothing in that letter verifying leak detection and he was just trying to be sure that they were 100% sure these people have to change their line. Steve says it's concerning these people get a letter out of the blue, you say their water's leaking but nothing's changed at all, no water in the driveway, no water in their yard, no outrageous water bills, yet they're being told they have to hire a plumber. Tom said it would then be up to the homeowner or the homeowner's plumber to isolate the valve, maybe put dye in the toilet, and verify the leak. When Steve asked if anybody is double checking the work to find out if it really is leaking Tom stated that the plumber could call the Water Department and they'd come do a shutoff at the curb and the plumber could shut off the valve in the house and then they'd listen for a leak. Carl then asks so if our plumbers go and someone has this letter, they can go in the house and shut the valve off and then call the Water Department to come with their listening device...Absolutely Tom says, then it can really be checked. Tom says that would be no problem. Steve says that would be the first thing he would do then, look at the meter in the house, make sure nothing's running but it doesn't say anything for the outside line. Tom says they will amend the letter and make it more vague so the homeowner has to rely on the plumber to pinpoint it for them. Basically the City will be passing the buck off to a private plumber to help with this,

the City determines there's a possible leak, the plumber has to investigate it and determine where. Carl agreed this is fair enough, that's good.

- f. In summary, Tom says there's 2 things they're going to change with the leak letter, it will say there's a possible leak on the property and it's the homeowner's responsibility and the timeframe is to be included in those letters. Carl thinks 30 days is enough but Tom says there may be some legality with that timeframe. Steve says as long as there is an effort by the homeowner to start the process in that timeframe, that's good. Carl asks the Board members if they're done with this matter, all agree they're satisfied at this point. Carl thanks Tom Gabak and the City Manager for coming and says they resolved a lot tonight.

PLUMBING CODE CHANGE:

- Steve and Carl discuss when they'd gotten the packet from Jane a couple weeks ago, regarding how much a landlord could do plumbing wise and it said "up to a three unit" which was believed to be a mistake. Carl had it there and said it was in fact a mistake; it should read "up to two units, owner-occupied". Carl had it right there and Steve read "Homeowner Exam – Homeowners may obtain plumbing permit upon passing homeowner's exam ...plumbing up to three units and must be owner-occupied". Carl stated he'd give this to Kim to be changed. It would read "owner-occupied up to two units". Steve brought up landlords think once they take a test they're good to go, that they're almost partly licensed, they're doing more than just replace. And they use that test for all their properties, all across the board even though they know they're not supposed to do it. Carl said that Kim would change the 2 spots where it was incorrect (3 unit to a 2 unit) and get the revised sheets out to all the plumbers to put in their books. Kim Bauso stated that all the plumbers licensed with the City have the packets already and we'll just send them the page with the change. Carl says to do a letter that says for example page 15, insert this. There was discussion about when this mistake was made, when was this re-written, that they should go back to the minutes from when Jim Moore was the board. Carl said he would go back and look through his file but in the meantime it would definitely be changed in the City charter. It must have been changed to a three in the old Charter, why it got changed to a three they do not know.

SUMP PUMPS:

- Carl handed out an amended page to Board members with the sump pump Code change made by Jane from last month's meeting.
- Carl states that the Engineering Department has been called out to different residences especially in the winter time – sump pump was going out into the street causing ice patches. Apparently Mark Odrzywolski from Engineering knocked on the door of one property in particular and told them they had to remove this line, and they've either got to go into the storm with it or if there's no storm, they've got to put in a dry well in their back yard. Bill Orman

then asked if there was opportunity for these people to pump it into their yard if grade allows it or does it have to go into a driveway. Carl states if they want to pump it into their yard and have a swamp it's up to them but it can't go to an adjoining property. It is in the City Charter that one cannot cause a flooding problem on a neighbor's property. So this leaves the question where are they going to go with it?

- Discussion on resolving sump pump issues in different neighborhoods, including the creation of dry wells where needed.

LICENSE RENEWALS:

- Question was raised reading the process of license renewal status so far; Kim advised that were approximately 5-6 plumbers who had not yet renewed and there is a \$50 late charge if the renewal is in January.

NEW BUSINESS:

- There was some discussion on how to handle unlicensed plumbers. The suggestion was made to create a quarterly newsletter to keep licensed plumbers up to date on current issues, and also to serve as a reminder to them to make a phone call if they witness work being performed by unlicensed plumbers. It was noted that the Electrical Board did work together to resolve a similar issue.

Meeting was adjourned at 6:10 p.m.